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PLATE 3A. Wet-season bark hut, Arnhem Land

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PLATE 3B. Painting a design on bark, Oenpelli

● 142
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A Mauwulan, Yirrkalla



B Nangapiana, Groote Eylandt



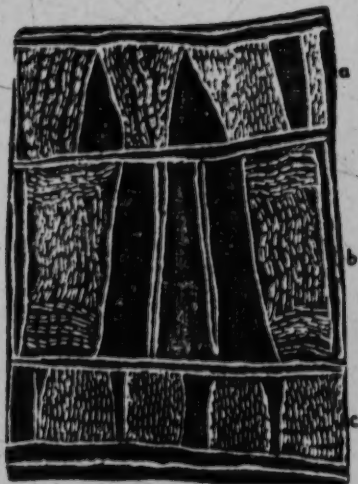
C Kumutun, Oenpelli



D Wulkini, Liverpool River

PLATE 4. Artists of Arnhem Land

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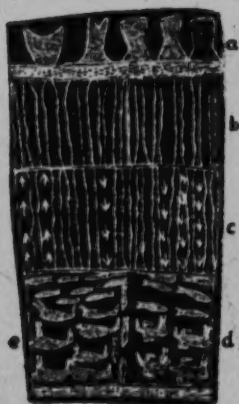


PLATE 124. Bark paintings, Yirrkalla

A The man, Boriota, at Bartalumba B Port Bradshaw C A mangrove swamp
D An aboriginal smoking a Malay pipe

 THE ABORIGINES OF EAST ARNHAM LAND

Everyday Life

262
511 Being a purely nomadic people, the greater part of the time of these aborigines is devoted to the procuring of food. The coastal districts of Arnhem Land are much better supplied than the arid areas of the inland, but even there a serious shortage of food is by no means infrequent. Almost all living creatures are eaten, as well as a large variety of roots and berries, but there is ever the daily uncertainty concerning the supplying of the body's needs.

461
517 When not engaged in hunting, the men spend many hours fashioning their weapons and utensils, in which work they display a marked degree of skill and ability. The preparations for, and the actual performance of, ceremonials occupy much time and energy, and in these their love of decorative and dramatic art finds truly remarkable expression.

462 The women are the real burden-bearers. When the camping ground is reached, it is the women who have to prepare the camp and obtain the necessary wood and water. Every day they engage in the search for food, such as the smaller animals, roots, berries, and shell fish. No matter how successful the men have been in their pursuit of larger game, the women must not fail in their daily contribution to the needs of the family. To them also falls the care of the younger children, and the construction of most of the utensils for ordinary use.

854 Great affection is shown by both parents for their children, who are rarely corrected, and whose every whim is responded to. 142
145 When an aboriginal baby is born it is of a light yellowish colour, but during the course of a week or so darkens to the normal chocolate-brown of the race. [302] For the purpose of ensuring this deepening of colour, the infant, when two or three days old, is rubbed all over with a mixture of ashes and powdered charcoal. [856] Immediately after birth the nose is flattened and the nostrils distended by finger pressure. The form of the skull is also moulded by the mid-wife's hands.

853 Babies are nursed by their mothers until they are up to four years of age, and during that period are extremely plump and 145 soft-fleshed. After weaning, however, they quickly develop into the spindly-limbed form characteristic of the children of many
PRIMITIVE RACES.

 THE ABORIGINES OF EAST ARNHAM LAND

Warfare and Physique

Warfare

- [619] On account of the want of cohesion between the various tribal
 721 hordes, each of which maintains to a large extent a separate and independent existence, various causes, such as the competition for women, give rise to much hostility, and warfare is a pronounced feature of the life of this aboriginal community. Though an organised clash of arms is of infrequent occurrence, many are killed under varied circumstances as a result of this tribal hostility.
- 628 Numerous killings also result from family vendettas, which are carried on through many generations. In the pursuance of these vendettas the usual practice is to take a man by stealth, while he is asleep or when separated from his companions.

A ceremony known as "Makkarata" is a very important and valuable means of healing breaches of the peace. In this ceremony two groups of men, composed of the offending and the offended tribes or divisions respectively, take up their positions some 150 yards apart on a piece of open ground. With each of these groups will be a number of neutral men, who are not concerned in the dispute in question, whose duty it is to see that no unfair advantage is taken by either party.

The chief offender, who is also accompanied by neutrals, then runs backwards and forwards across the centre of the ground, while each man of the offended party throws one or more spears at him. If this man succeeds in avoiding the spears thrown, he then, in a descriptive dance, approaches the offended party, and taking his stand in front of their leader thrusts out his leg, into which a spear is promptly plunged. In this way the offence is wiped out, and peace is restored between these previously hostile parties. I have known feuds of many years' standing to be completely healed by this ceremony.

Physique

- 142 These coastal tribes of East Arnhem Land are physically of a fine type, virile, pugnacious, and manly. Though generally somewhat slither in build, the average height of both sexes is approximately the same as that of our own race. Because of their nomadic life, their continual walking, running and dancing, most

THE ABORIGINES OF EAST ARNHAM LAND

of them are in a condition of perfect physical fitness, lithe and graceful in all their movements, and tireless in their own pursuits. 142 ●

Various diseases, such as yaws, tropical ulcers, and ophthalmia, are frequently observed, while there are some cases of gangosa, granuloma, and leprosy. Epidemics of measles, influenza and whooping cough have upon occasion been carried through from the outer fringes of settlement, and have badly stricken these isolated tribes. 164

These aborigines will survive an almost unbelievable amount of physical injury, but they quickly succumb to diseases of a general character, particularly to fevers and pulmonary complaints, against which no constitutional powers of resistance have been developed. Considerable medicinal use is made of a wide variety of herbs and plants, but most of their practices in this realm are crude and of little value. In many cases it is believed that, as magic has caused disease, so counteractive magic will heal. 755
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6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951

OI17 Murngin OI17

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[for captions, see category 116, p. x]

PLATE II

[Facing p. xxxii]

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951

OI17 Murngin OI17

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[291]



[For caption see category 116, p. x]

PLATE III

[Facing p. 1]

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951

OI17 Murngin OI17

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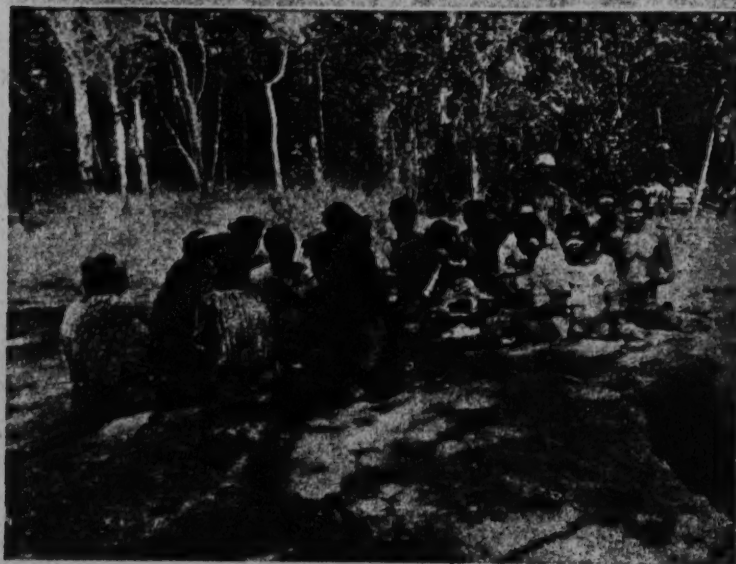


PLATE V.
[Facing p. 33]

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951

OI17 Murngin OI17

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[Facing p. 64]

PLATE VI

[For caption see category 116, p. xi]

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951

OII7 Murngin OII7

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PLATE VII

[Facing p. 65]

[For captions see category 116, p. xi]

6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951

O117 Murngin O117

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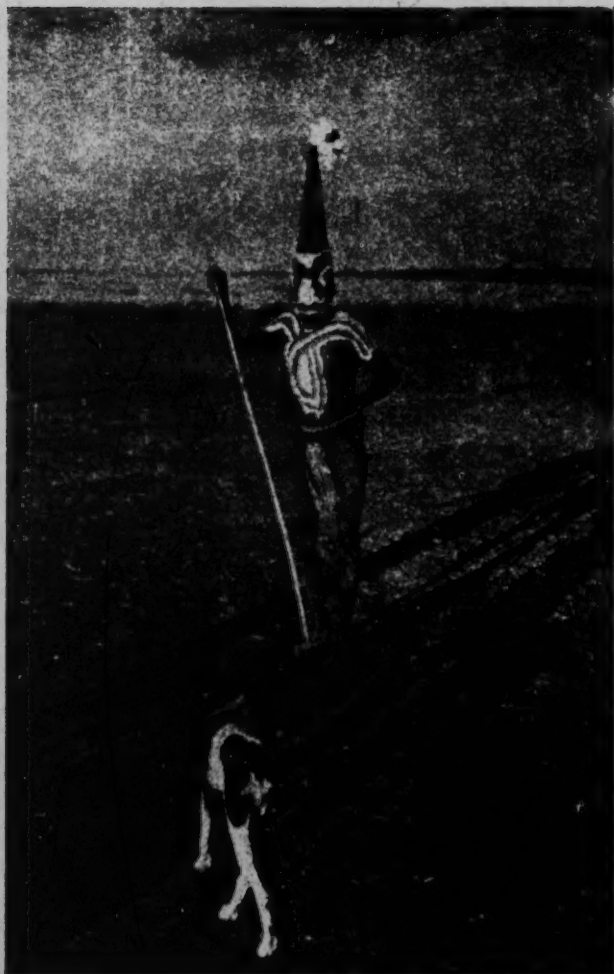


PLATE XV:

[p. 84(F)]
[For caption, see category 116, p. xiii]

CHAPTER 2

THE ARNHEM LAND ABORIGINES

- 142 Who are the people of Arnhem Land? What is the pattern of their life, the background against which these events took place?

The physical characteristics of the Australian Aborigines as a whole are well known — their chocolate-brown skin, wavy hair, slightly prognathoid features and rather broad nostrils. The people of the Arnhem Land coast show some differences from those of the immediate inland and of the centre. Food of all kinds is more plentiful, and fresh water easier to find; and so they are rather more solidly built, with heavier legs and broader shoulders than the "desert" natives. Their skin appears to be darker, although here and there are lighter individuals who show the influence of part-Malayan or Macassan descent. Generally speaking, they are lively and excitable and show emotion more readily than their southern neighbours; all along this coast the tribes have a long history of "blood feuds", kept up between one family and another, or among various clans. They prefer to dispose of their enemies by open killings rather than by the secret work of magical spells — although these too, it is said, are freely employed.

105 Since on this fertile coast the Aborigines do not have to exert themselves quite so strenuously as those in more barren and inhospitable regions, they can devote more time to material culture — to weapons, cave and bark paintings, and a wide range of sacred objects. For this reason, too, we find numbers of clan and tribal groups within a comparatively small area. Tribal territories are more restricted than in the semi-desert areas where men and women must be almost continuously on the move in their search for food.

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954

OI17 Murngin OI17

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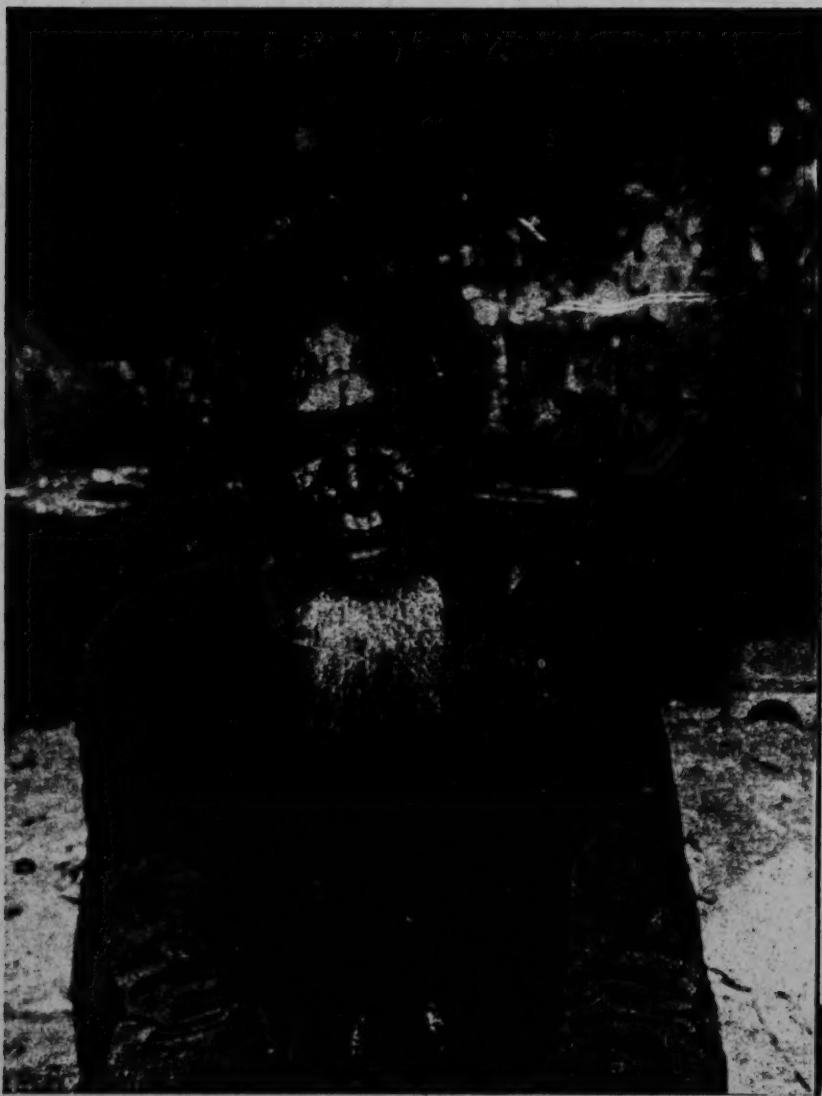


Plate 3: Wonggu at Yirrkalla

[Facing p. 21]

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954

OI17 Murngin OI17

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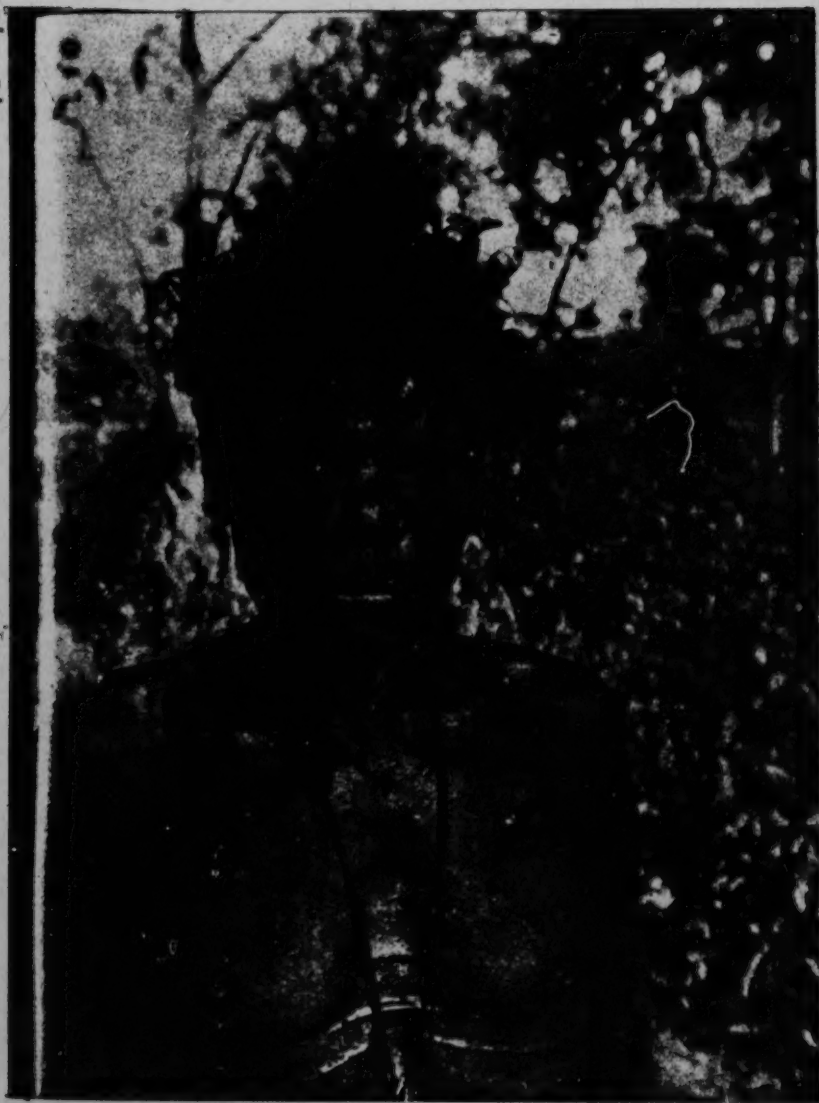


Plate 6: Mawwulan at Yirrkalla.

[p. 25(c)]

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954

OI17 Murngin OI17,

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Plate 8a: Naburdjo at Yirrkalla; a wife of Djirin.

Plate 8b: Djirin at Yirrkalla; a son of Wonggu.

[304]



[p. 25(E)]

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954

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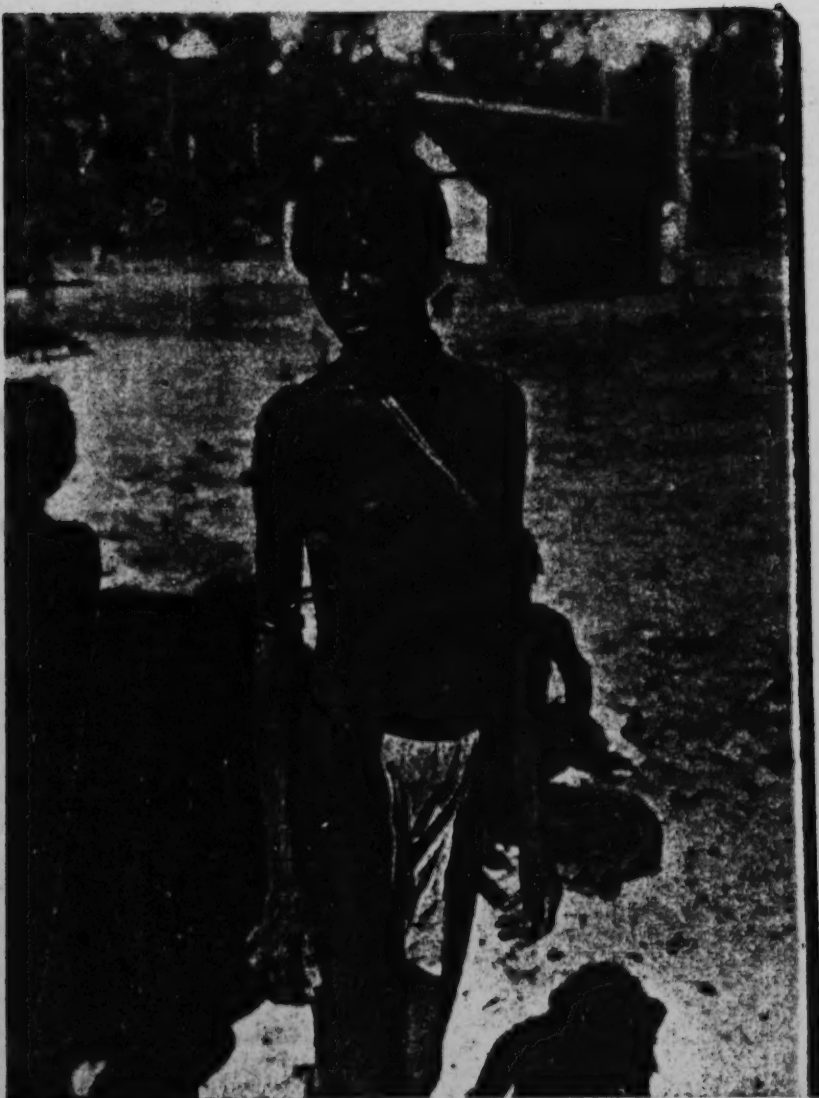


Plate 11: Bulaninda at Yirrkalla; daughter of Dagiar (Tuckiar).

[p. 25(H)]

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943) 1949
OI17 Murgin OI17

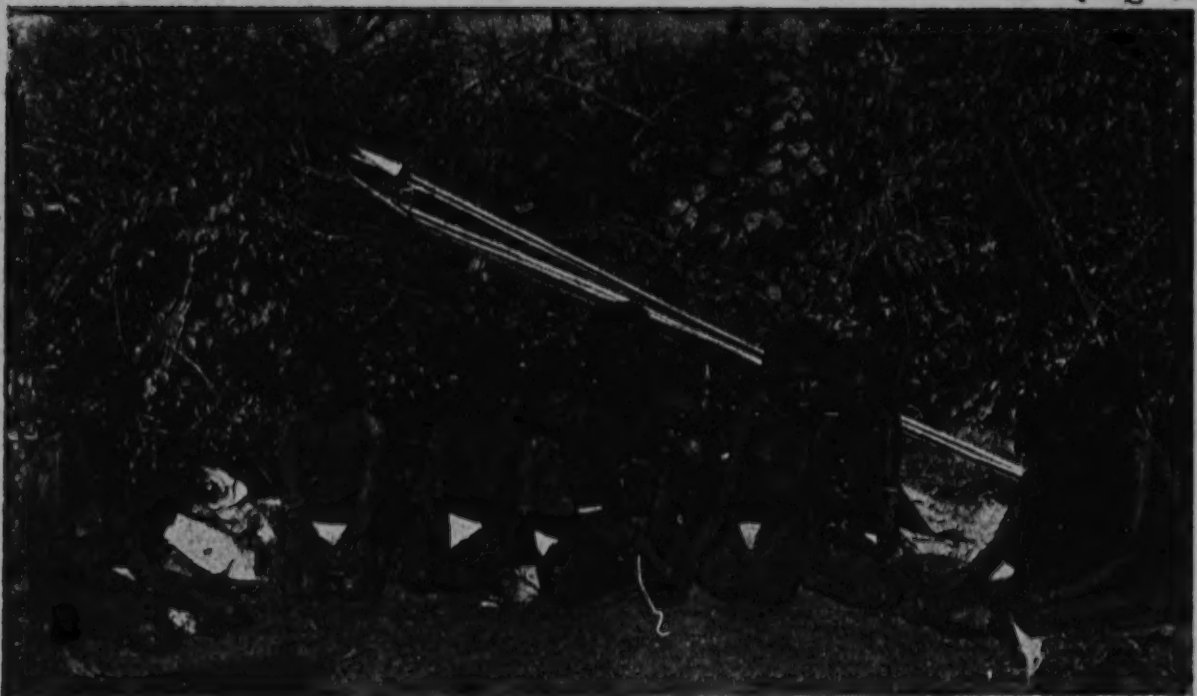


Plate 2. The family is the unit of social life and lives a more or less independent existence within the horde. A man of Blue Mud Bay with his wives and young children. The breakwind of boughs is the only form of shelter used at night during most of the dry season.

[Thomson, p. 42]

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The woman is the provider of the vegetable food, which forms the chief food supply.

Plate 9. Women of Blue Mud Bay with their yam sticks, gathering corms of the Tall Spike Rush (*Heleocharis sphacelata*), which, for several months towards the end of the dry season, is one of the staple foods.

[p. 58(D)]



Plate 11. A young woman of Central Arnhem Land making one of the fine string net baskets called *kai'u*, used for carrying vegetable foods and *gerri*, as well as in ceremonial exchange.

(Compare Plate 10 overleaf)

[Facing p. 75]

PLATE J

MAN, JUNE, 1961

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(a) Murrngit of Min'nyer'nyir of Tjamparpoingo clan. The three flat objects at the top are stones, with holes represented by spots. The winged male murrngit is Malloppallamir, the other his wife (and sister) Barambit. They come from Guruvanna on the mainland of Arnhem Land behind Howard Island. Left, the male Bundango.



(b) The six murrngit of Wilindjingo of Milingi clan, Lower Glyde River, and the 'shade' (malli) of the murrngitmirri himself, lower right. Next to him are Nari, male, and Murrng'wang, the female; the bulge is the womb in which she bore the four junior murrngit above.

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(c) Wilindjingo, whose murrngit are shown in (b) above. This man was also a renowned rainmaker of his clan. The basket-like structure on his forehead is nganaak (lit. flesh), dried human flesh or mango (blood) which are used in the practice of magic and ritual cannibalism. The two small wooden pegs projecting from the basket are yel and are made from tamarind (*Erythrophloeum labouchei*). They are part of the stick in-trade of the murrngit.



(d) Sorcerer, called ragalk or kalk', Barawa Tribe, Cape Stewart district, north central Arnhem Land, with kandjurnas, atlatla-like objects sharpened to a fine point and made from tramwood called malpin. The ragalk are said to insert these kandjurnas into the hearts of their victims by way of the neck, thence down the dorsal aorta. In this way they claim the ragalk draws out the blood of his victim. In Australia these kandjurnas are popularly known as 'pointing bones'.

'MARRNGIT,' 'MARRNGITMIRRI' AND 'KALK'

Photographs (c, d): D. F. Thomson

[Facing p. 97]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957

Oll7 Murngin Oll7

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PORTRAIT OF A YULENGOR

After a prolonged vendetta, Wonggu was the last of his horde; now he is the father of fifty children

[Frontispiece- facing title page]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957

O117 Murngin O117



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LANDFALL

Two Yulengor families in their dug-out canoes



133

ARNHEM LAND BEACH

Imported cattle near Yirrkala station

[facing P6]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957

OII7 Murngin OII7



A TYPICAL YULENGOR OF ARNHEM LAND

A pleasant, popular youth 'credited' with six or seven tribal killings

[facing p22]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957

O117 Murngin O117

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AT YIRRKALA

Yulengor clearing land for gardens

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WET-SEASON HUT OF BARK SHEETS

The woman is making string from bark fibre

[pacing p 23]

YULENGOR

141 in front of him, and in this position his knee-cap is on a level
516 with his chin. Another habit, dependent on long shins and as common as the white man's hands-on-hips, is to stand on one leg with the other drawn up so that its foot rests above the other knee-cap. Anyone can laboriously do the trick but only a long-shinned aboriginal would find it comfortable.

● 142 Corpulence is not found in Arnhem Land, for Yulengor have little opportunity to put on weight where food is scarce, poorly balanced, and mostly roughage. Women spend most of their time hunting, and frequently travel [462] twenty or thirty miles a day in their search for food. By [482] carrying huge loads on their heads they acquire a unique poise and graceful carriage unknown elsewhere.

Men seem to have short necks, but this is due to chests being so well developed that they give the impression of being deliberately thrown out and upward. Back and pectoral muscles ripple the skin and the whole body tapers sharply.

Aboriginal hair is dark to black in colour, though on children's heads the tips are frequently bleached a reddish-brown. It is wavy and curly, but never fuzzy, and is fine in texture rather than coarse.

Eyes are set deep under beetling brows; pupils are smoky blue-black, and the rest of the eye is definitely not white, but rather veiled and blotched a yellow pastel shade. Finely chiselled ears lie close to the skull in both young and old; the nose, though deeply cut away between the eyes and uniformly broad, cannot be termed flat.

Aboriginal teeth are strong and well formed, and are astoundingly effective in snipping through bush rope, holding and straightening a spear in a vice-like grip, and masticating tough meat and fibrous foods. Teeth give little trouble and most of them are retained for life, even if worn down to the gums.

[164]

MEN OF THE STONE AGE

Of aboriginal feet the least said the better; for they 142 • definitely give the lie to the theory that protective footwear spoils natural shapeliness. Toes are broken, knobbed, and widely spaced: this is particularly true of the first and second toes, by which they easily grasp and lift spears and large sticks or grip the rigging in climbing to the masthead of a lugger. Hands, however, are beautifully shaped, with long tapering fingers, and compare more favourably with an average European hand. [481]

Finally, aboriginal skin is not black, as is popularly supposed, but is in varying shades of velvety brown, for there are blondes and brunettes in the Arnhem Land bush.

Daily life has not changed in a thousand decades, and still involves hunting with stone and wooden spears and stone axes for everything the nomad eats. Their camp grounds are well known, and are usually found on sandy slopes or beaches, reasonably close to water but as far as possible from the swamps that usually swarm with mosquitoes and sand-flies. A typical instance is 'Damballia' or Breamer Island, favoured for turtle hunting and named after its totemic waterhole. Having heard a lot about it, I set out to see it with some boys in a canoe. I took provisions and water for myself and flour for the boys, but they declined my offer of a drum for water, remarking that the well on the island would supply their needs and mine too. 361
[411]
[224]

With a favourable wind and tide we landed on the island at sunrise, and whilst my billy boiled, the boys went off to the well for water. As I was finishing my breakfast I noticed an overpowering smell; and found that it came from the well-water they were using to mix their damper. Even then they steadfastly maintained that it was up to standard, and politely declined some of mine. I found the well to be an open waterhole, completely covered by pandanus palms in which thousands of small doves and other birds were roosting. Nearby were several broken-down huts, and dozens 361

YULENGOR

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[833] it is an invitation to the new spirit to come to the mother from the spirit world. Ideas on the birth question are very vague and the time factor is ignored. Wogburra, who had been taught to read and write and had lived amongst white folk for twenty years, told me that his wife was about to give birth to a child, and gossip named Miniji as the father. He intended to spear Miniji. I asked when his wife had last seen Miniji, and he was certain that it had been two years previously, when Miniji left for his tribal country.

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●142 Babies are smoky pink in colour at birth, and mothers smear them with a mixture of ashes and water to hasten the darkening of the skin. From birth the child lies in the sun, and as soon as it can clutch a chunk of red meat it is allowed to suck it. A mother carries her infant under her arm on a thick roll of soft bark, but the child soon learns to sit on her shoulder; it clutches her hair for support and sleeps through a great part of the day. Most babies are curly headed, fat, strong, and contented, but as soon as they start eating bush food they develop distended stomachs and become thin and prone to disease.

855
[595] In the better type of family the utmost affection is shown by all wives toward the children of the husband's other wives, and it is sometimes difficult to say which is the mother. [853] She does not always suckle it herself, nor does the infant object to a variation. If a mother dies, the care of her children is assured, and I have seen only two children that could be called waifs or strays.

[861] Children are pampered unbelievably and are rarely punished. The most a mother will do when her patience is exhausted is to shake it by the shoulder, shout at it and threaten it with a ghost or a white man. Imitating their elders, the youngsters learn their lessons and make fun for themselves in the hard days of childhood, though their games seem to foreshadow the strenuous adult life ahead of them. Girls play at gathering food, making huts and weaving dilly-bags,

15: Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936) 1957

OII7 Murngin OII7

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FOOD GATHERERS

Women and children setting out to search for food

[pacing p 71]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957

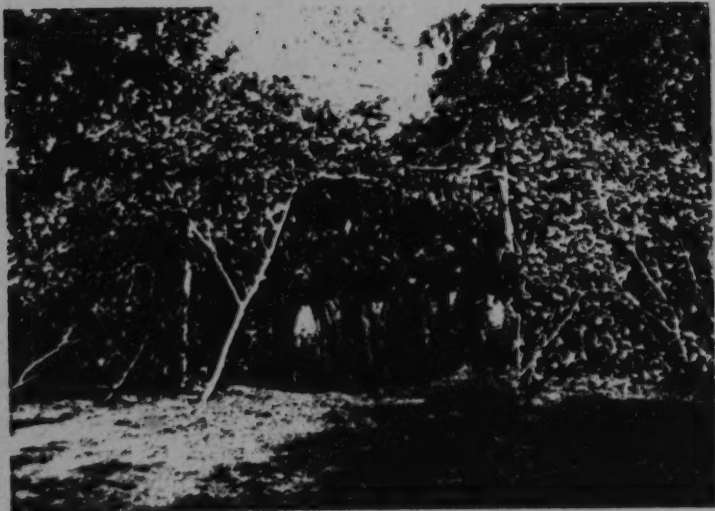
O117 Murngin O117



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AN AVERAGE FAMILY

Yulengor at their evening meal



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TOTEMIC DANCE

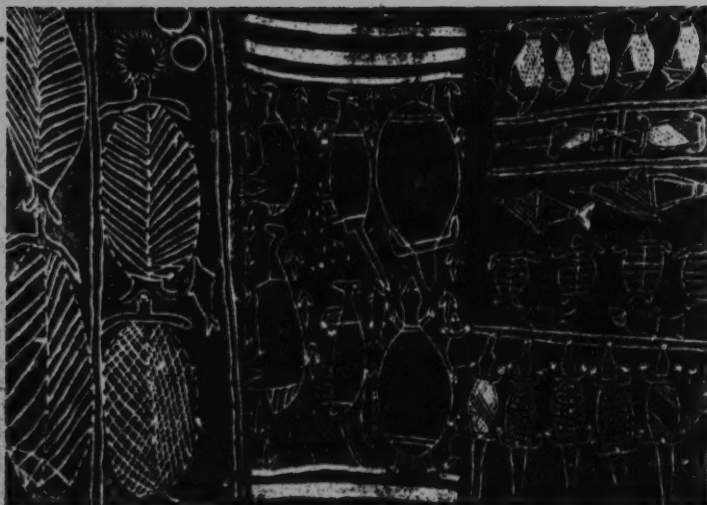
Yulengor carry the totem or marsian from its bush shelter

[facing p 86]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957

Oll7 Murngin Oll7

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BARK PAINTINGS

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A WITCH DOCTOR

or 'Marragitt'

[facing p87]

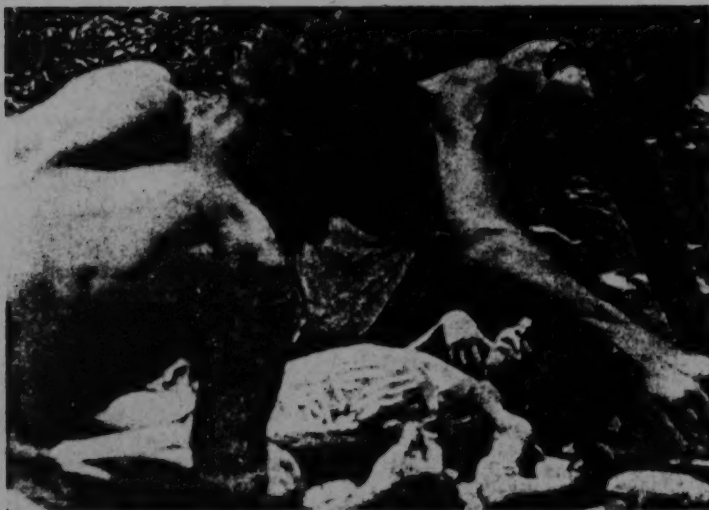
15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
O117 Murngin O117



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HEAD CUTTING FOR SORROW OR JOY

Mothers 'rejoicing' for sons they had thought dead



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INITIATION CEREMONY

Painting a boy for his initiation-circumcision

[facing p 134]

15: Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936) 1957

O117 Murngin O117

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POWERFUL PADDLERS

During cyclonic weather five Yulengor paddled 130 miles, past hostile islands, to get medical aid for the author

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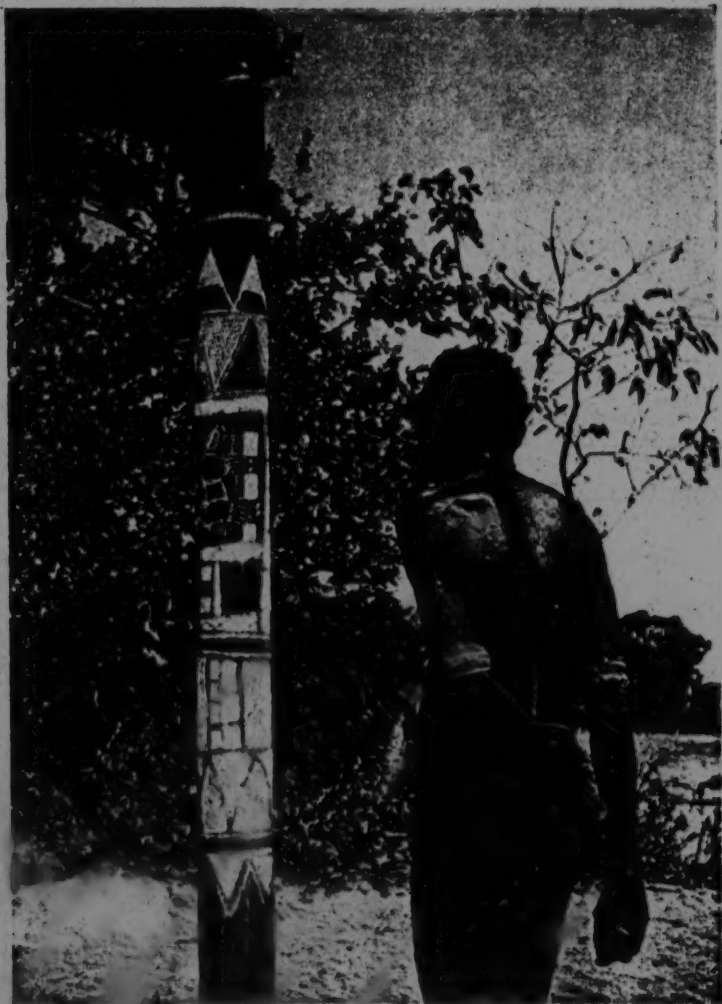
INTERMENT

Skeletons being placed in a burial post

[facing p135]

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957

O117 Murngin O117



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BURIAL POST IN A DESERTED CAMP

[facing P150]